

# First Steps in C. S. A.

## 18. POLITICS

### 1. THE MEANING OF POLITICS

Omitting Text-book definitions of "Politics", we may say that Politics is the science and art of securing and advancing the temporal welfare of a community organised as a State. The business of politics, therefore involves both the laying down of general principles and their application to concrete problems. Of course, the principles on which States are built today differ widely. For example, one of the principles on which the Communist State is built, is the complete abolition of private property, and therefore, Communist-politics will lay down this principle and then, apply it in practice by the denial of private property to all citizens.

The scope of politics is the temporal well-being of the community as a whole. To say this, means that politics is concerned with the relations of the members of the community between themselves and between them and the things of the world. Again, it is concerned with the rights and duties of citizens to each other and to the State; with the rights and duties of individual States towards other States in the great family of nations; with commerce, industry, social institutions, public morality and the social order in general. Remember that the extent to which politics deals with the economic and social life of the country depends on the "brand" of politics in action. Thus, a State built on the principles of Liberalism (See Discussion 12), will hardly interfere with the economic life of the country, and Liberal Politics will steer clear off the shoals of economics. On the other hand, a Socialist State will tend more and more to control and order the economic life of the country and hence, encroach more and more upon almost every aspect of human life.

### 2. POLITICS AND MORALITY

Since the State, including its Government and its citizens, is made up of human beings, it follows, that the members of a State, whether they be Statesmen, Politicians, Cabinet Members, members of an One-Party State, or humble citizens, they are all subject to just man-made laws and to the laws of God. The latter, known partly by reason and partly by revelation, makes up what is known as the Moral Law, and is more fundamental than, and superior to, man-made State Law.

The Moral Law forbids all men to indulge in certain actions and to engage in certain ways of conduct. Some such actions are for-

bidden because they are intrinsically evil, that is to say, these actions, always and everywhere come into conflict with reason and human nature; such are, lying, murder and impurity. Others are forbidden only when they are done in circumstances, or from motives, which conflict with right reason and human nature; thus, drinking beer is in itself not blame-worthy, but it becomes morally wrong when indulged in to excess.

The application of the Moral Law to politics becomes easy to understand, when we consider the parallel between a doctor and a statesman. The former is charged with the physical health of his patient, and the latter with the material welfare of the country. Both, as human beings, are subject to the same moral laws and principles which bind all men. Like any other man, the doctor is forbidden to indulge in any action outlawed by the principles of morality, such as the deliberate taking of human life. On the other hand, he owes it to the obligations of his office and profession to employ every legitimate means to save the life of his patient. But the Moral Law does not tell him the technical details of the medical treatment. Indeed, he is free to decide the appropriate medical technique and is limited only by those moral obligations which bind him as well as every other man.

Now the Statesman or Politician as a human being is bound by the moral principles which bind all men: again, as a *Statesman or Politician* he is under the special obligations of his office to promote the general welfare of his country. It follows, that in the discharge of his special obligations he must not violate the general principles of the Moral Law. It is not, however, the business of the Moral Law to pass judgement upon the technical methods employed to advance the temporal welfare of the State: that matter of technique must be left to the technical experts. Yet, in so far as these methods are the result of human actions, these actions must not be such as are prohibited by the Moral Law. Thus, if a politician attempts to establish a more just distribution of the national income, the methods and means he employs must be in keeping with the principles of the Moral Law. Again, the Moral Law will not attempt to tell him whether a "free trade" or "protectionist" economy will best further the welfare of the country, or whether a system of direct or indirect representation will result in the most efficient distribution of political power; but it will censure the means he adopts to establish a free trade or protectionist economy, or a system of direct or indirect representation. Once this close connection between the Moral Law and Politics is understood, we can readily understand the teaching of Pope Pius XI, who in *Quadragesimo Anno*, para 41, writes, that:

Holy church "can never relinquish her God-given task of interposing her authority, not indeed, in matters of technique, for which she has neither the equipment nor the mission but in all matters that fall under the Moral Law."

### 3. PARTY POLITICS

The politician, as we have seen, is bound by the Moral Law under which all men live; and moreover, by the special obligations of his office. These place on him the special responsibility of finding the best means (subject to the limitations imposed by the Moral Law) to further the advancement of the State. Hence, while keeping within the limits of the Moral Law, there is always plenty of room for a legitimate difference of opinion as to the "best methods and means" for securing the welfare of the State. In fact, as Pope Leo XIII tells us in his encyclical *On the Christian Constitution of States*:

"There is no doubt that in the sphere of politics ample matter may exist for legitimate difference of opinion, and that, always respecting the rights of justice and truth, all may strive to bring in effect the ideas likely to be more conducive than others to the general welfare."

Thus Pope Leo has outlined the fundamental reason for the existence of political parties, and at the same time, he gives all Catholics a useful directive. In every country which boasts freedom of speech, there will be found groups of citizens who, while agreeing on fundamentals, legitimately differ from the rest of people in the country as to the best *methods* of achieving progress. The formation of political parties is therefore, natural and Catholics may join such parties, provided such parties respect the rights of justice and truth. Unfortunately, two main factors render it almost impossible for Catholics to share in the political life of certain States. *Firstly*, the moral foundation of certain parties is such that they are led to reject the rights of justice and truth, thus, the Communist party. *Secondly*, the degenerate and sectional attitude of some parties, which place party interests above the welfare of the country. The modern instance on keeping to the "Party Line" has prevented many an able man from "mixing in politics" which has become a competitive struggle for power and not a means to further the common good. Writing after World War I, Pius XI, traces the evils caused by "degenerate political parties," when he says:—

"In the political domain the parties have almost made a law not to seek the common good through a healthy rivalry and by means of the truth of their opinions, but instead, to seek their own interests to the detriment of others. Hence what do we witness? Plots and attacks against citizens and against the Ministers of the State, terrorism and open rebellion". (*On the Troubles left by the European War. Dec. 23rd, 1922*)

### 4. CATHOLICS AND POLITICS

Must one, therefore, conclude that Catholics should refrain from sharing in political life? Pope Leo XIII has already answered:

*Firstly*, Catholics are free to join any political party provided it respects the "rights of justice and truth."

Secondly, it is the DUTY of Catholics to make the best use of politics. In fact, if they abstain from sharing in public life, "this would," writes Pope Leo XIII, "also tend to the injury of the Christian religion, for as much as they would come into power who are badly disposed towards the Church, and they who are willing to befriend her would be deprived of all influence. It follows therefore clearly that Catholics have just reasons for taking part in the conduct of public affairs." (*The Christian Constitution of States*). Pope Pius XI makes this conclusion of Leo XIII still more clear when he tells us: "Every good citizen is bound to make the best use of politics, and Catholics in particular, since the profession of the Catholic Faith requires that they be the best citizens." (*Peculiari Quaedam*). This is not the place to trace the history of countries which have fallen victims of Totalitarianism, but it is a significant fact, that in all such countries, the Church was declared Public Enemy No. 1 by the Dictators, and the voice of Catholics was stifled and suppressed in every public assembly.

Thirdly, the Holy See makes a clear distinction between mere "party politics", i.e., a political group working for its own sectional or class interests, and "politics" which aim at improving the common good. Catholics are warned against mere party politics.

We may conclude by examining a practical difficulty. Since politics today, in even the most democratic country is run on party lines, how can any Catholic enter politics without giving his allegiance to some political party? As we have noted above, certain parties are banned to Catholics, on account of the anti-moral foundations of such parties; other parties which are not anti-religious, leave ample room for Catholics to share in politics. In fact, a well trained Catholic may even infuse in the "Party Line" principles of Catholic thought and action, without accepting any weakness of the Party. As Pope Leo XIII writes:—

"In doing so they assume not the responsibility of approving what is blameworthy in the actual methods of Government, but seek to turn these very methods, so far as is possible, to the genuine and true public good, and to use their best endeavours, at the same time, to infuse as it were into all the veins of the State, the healthy sap and blood of Christian wisdom and virtue." (*The Christian Constitution of States*).

#### READING :—

C. C. Clump, S.J., *A Catholic Guide to Social and Political Action*, Pp. 55-67. (Oxford C. S. G., also at the Examiner Press, Bombay). C. C. Clump, S.J., *The Economic and Political Life of Man*, Pp. 245-47.

#### EXERCISES :—

1. Define Politics.
2. Explain the connection between the Moral Law and Politics.
3. Explain the attitude of the Church towards politics.
4. Mention the main political parties in India, and outline the policy of each.

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